

SMA Leaders Book Note – Motorcycle Safety

Command Sergeants Major,

The weather is warming up at installations around the world and Soldiers are preparing their motorcycles for another spring and summer on the road. There are more than 35-thousand motorcycles registered on Army installations. As the number of motorcycles goes up, accidents increase proportionally. But accidents can be reduced, and many times prevented, by choosing the correct motorcycle and having the proper equipment and training.

Many Soldiers return from deployment having saved a substantial amount of money and with the dream to buy a motorcycle. Many first time riders assume a motorcycle is an easy machine to operate. What motorcycle is right for you? Depending on your needs, there are many motorcycles to choose from that will best fit your lifestyle. Use the internet to read about the different types of motorcycles or visit local dealerships to talk to the experts. Motorcycle riding skills are learned; all Soldiers are required to attend a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) course at their installation. The MSF courses are free of charge and can be scheduled through your Installation Safety Office.

To operate a motorcycle on a military installation, riders are required to wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE must be properly fitted and must be highly visible to ensure the rider is protected and is seen by other drivers.

Helmets are the single most important item of PPE. Currently, there are two organizations setting safety standards for motorcycle helmets in the United States, the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Snell Memorial Foundation. The DOT sets the minimum standards that all helmets sold for motorcycling on public streets must meet. The Snell Memorial Foundation has independently tested manufacturer's helmets since 1957, and sets safety standards for events such as motorcycling, auto racing, and skateboarding, just to name a few. Riders are required to wear eye protection. Eye protection must consist of either impact- or shatter-resistant goggles / glasses, or a full-face shield properly attached to the helmet. A windshield or eyeglasses do not provide proper eye protection. The full-face helmet with shield provides the best protection.

Riders need to wear a high-visibility upper garment by day and a retro-reflective garment at night. An example of a retro-reflective garment would be the PT belt worn diagonally across the shoulder, or specifically designed clothing that incorporates reflective patches to maximize visibility. Pants are required to cover the entire leg and should provide the same protection against abrasion as jackets. Closed-finger gloves are required to protect the rider's fingers from flying objects. The glove should be made for motorcycle use. Finally, leather boots or over-the-ankle shoes must be worn to protect the feet and ankles. Military boots meet this requirement.

When it comes to wearing the proper PPE, leaders must set the example. Brigadier General Doyle D. “Don” Broome, Jr., the Deputy Commanding General of U.S. Army Cadet Command, was riding his Harley last fall when a car cut in front of him to make a right turn. BG Broome’s first reaction was to grab his right front handbrake and laid down his motorcycle to avoid hitting the rear of the car. He slid down the highway at about 35 mph, but was wearing all of his PPE and survived the accident. The same cannot be said for more than 40 Soldiers who died in motorcycle accidents in fiscal year 2006, many of whom were not wearing the proper PPE.

The Motorcycle Mentorship Program (MMP) is another way leaders can set the example for our younger, less experienced Soldiers, family members and DoD Civilians. The MMP is a focused effort where more experienced riders can mentor those that are new to motorcycling, creating a positive environment for conduct and behavior while riding. The Motorcycle Mentorship Program is a force multiplier that supports the commander’s accident prevention program.

Thanks to the safety professionals at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center, we have made progress in motorcycle safety education and training. But it takes continued engagement by leaders to ensure our Soldiers, family members and DoD civilians “get it”. Let’s continue the downward trend of motorcycle accidents and have a safe riding season for 2007.

Thanks for all that you do for the Nation and for the United States Army.
Hooah!

SMA Ken Preston